

Ralph M. Munroe House (The Barnacle)
3485 Main Highway (Coconut Grove)
Miami
Dade County
Florida

HABS No. FL-261

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RALPH M. MUNROE HOUSE (THE BARNACLE) HABS No. FL-261

Location: 3485 Main Highway (Coconut Grove), Miami, Dade County, Florida.

Present Owner: Mrs. Wirth M. Munroe

Present Occupant: Same

Significance: The Ralph M. Munroe House exemplifies an indigenous design in response to site and climate. Historically its value to the cultural heritage of Miami is unique through its association with the developer of the earliest settlement in Coconut Grove, Jack's Bight (prior to 1873), which predated the establishment of the city of Miami.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Begun in the summer of 1891.
2. Architect: The house was designed by its owner, Commodore Ralph M. Munroe, developer of the earliest settlement in Coconut Grove, yachtsman, sailboat designer, photographer, author and conservationist. Commodore Munroe was also active in the civic concerns of the community; he gave the tracts of land housing the Housekeeper's Club (the oldest women's club in Florida) the Coconut Grove Library and a community church and cemetery (now the site of the Coconut Grove American Legion Hall).
3. Original and subsequent owners: Commodore Ralph M. Munroe was the original owner. His son, Wirth M. Munroe, and his wife have lived in the house since his death.
4. Original plans and construction: The original house was a bungalow built on pitch-pine foundations, about 6' above the ground (see photographs FL-261-1 & 2). The frame was of wrecked timber sawn in the factory mill on the site, and the siding, flooring, ceiling, shingles and millwork were brought from Pensacola. An open veranda originally extended across the southeast, facing the bay, and along the east and west sides. Wooden posts with diagonal braces and wooden palings enclosed the veranda, forming five bays, with wide wooden steps in the central bay. On the southeast facade, there was a large double-hung window with louvered shutters in the southwest bay, a top-hinged diamond in the central bay and a Dutch-door which led to the living room in the northeast corner. There was a bedroom in the southwest corner. In the center of the house was an octagonal dining room, open to the exposed attic with a square skylight centered on the hipped roof. The diamond-paned hinged windows, operated from below with ropes, provided central ventilation to the house. Steep enclosed wooden stairs led from the living room to the attic.

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The kitchen wing with its pump and cistern were at the rear of the house on the northwest.

6. Alterations and additions: Minor alterations to the original house can be seen in photograph FL-261-3. The original open foundations were enclosed with full lattice panels between foundation posts. These were later replaced by concrete piers and arched lattice panels and a concrete stoop was added to the wooden steps. (See photograph FL-261-5.) The first major alteration took place in 1908. The original house was jacked up and a new first floor installed below. The new first floor was of concrete block molded on site. This first alteration retained the original character of the house on the southeast elevation, including the openings on the veranda, but the side verandas were partially enclosed. The wooden shingles were replaced by Ludowici tiles, and the stovepipe on the northeast slope was removed. A library wing with a flat roof was added on the southeast at some undetermined later date (see photograph FL-261-9); still later, the library was enlarged, closing off the veranda and adding a hipped roof (see HABS measured drawing, sheet 4 of 8.) In 1928, the house was stuccoed with a rough trowel finish, and the existing terrace, made of broken tiles from the Royal Palm Hotel, was added.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural charcter: Built in Coconut Grove, just above Biscayne Bay, the Ralph M. Munroe House was designed with a concern for climate and site. It was built up off the bay, with wide verandas and high hinged openings above the windows to provide for maximum ventilation.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two story house is assymetrical in shape and measures 59'6" x 66'6".
2. Foundations: Presumed to be concrete.
3. Wall construction: The first floor is concrete block with a troweled stucco finish. The second floor has a wooden frame covered with troweled stucco. The walls are colored yellow ochre with brown trim.
4. Structural system, framing: Exterior walls are concrete load bearing on the first floor and wood timbers salvaged from shipwrecks on the second.

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5. Porches: The original veranda (now on the second floor) extended along three sides of the house. The remaining portions of this veranda have been screened. There is an open veranda on the first floor on the southeast, which extends slightly to the northeast.
 6. Chimneys: There are two chimneys on the southwest side of the house, one over the kitchen wing and one on the northeast wall of the library.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The original Dutch-door has been relocated as the main entrance on the first floor. The upper half is glazed in a diagonal pattern, and the lower half has two vertical panels. The other doors to the veranda are French doors with horizontal lights.
 - b. Windows: All of the windows are wood. Several of the original windows exist: they are double hung sash windows with one-light-over-one-light. The other windows are casement windows, used singly or in pairs. The diamond shaped windows appear to have been removed at an undetermined date.
 8. Roof: The hipped roofs over the main block and the library addition are covered with red Ludowici tiles.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: There are two rooms across the southeast and two rooms across the northeast. The kitchen wing extends to the northwest, and the separate library wing opens to the veranda on the southeast.
 - b. Second floor: Four corner rooms surround the central octagonal room which was the original dining room.
 2. Stairways: A single flight stairway with simple molded handrail and small square balusters ascends from the northwest corner room on the first floor to the central octagonal room on the second floor. A steep enclosed stairway ascends in a single flight from the northeast bedroom to the attic.
 3. Flooring: Dade County Pine.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls on the first floor are plaster; the ceilings are plaster and exposed ceiling beams. The walls on the second floor are beaded vertical tongue and groove pine which is also used as a wainscot. The ceilings are of composition board.

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5. Doorways and doors: The wood panel doors are set in simple unmolded trim.
6. Decorative features: The hardware on the original Dutch door consists of embossed brass knobs, escutcheons and hinges.

The house has several built-in storage and china cabinets.

7. Mechanical equipment: The original Franklin stove grate is presently installed in the library fireplace. A furnace was installed in 1926, with hot water radiators. The original cistern is beneath the porch on the northwest. A larger cistern was added in 1908, on the northwest, its concrete top is covered by the floor in the northwest room. There was an early windmill, since demolished. A small buttery below the first floor is accessible through a trap-door in the kitchen.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house faces southeast on a long narrow 5 acre lot, between Main Highway and Biscayne Bay. A dirt road winds through dense tropical growth to the clearing which surrounds the house. A sloping green lawn, with flower beds and clusters of coconut palms and other tropical trees, leads down to the bay.
2. Outbuildings: A small deteriorated cottage and boathouse (see FL-261-A) are located southeast of the main house. A two-story stuccoed garage apartment is located near the northwest rear of the house. "Three Sisters Cottage" (photograph FL-261-B-1) was located northwest of the main house, but has since been demolished.

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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and unpublished sources:

Catlow, Mrs. William R. (nee Patty Munroe). Partial History of the "Barnacle,". September 1969.

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Munroe Family Albums

B. Secondary and published sources:

Munroe, Ralph M. and Vincent Gilpin. The Commodore's Story.
Pennsylvania: Livingston Publishing Company, 1930. Reprinted by
the Historical Association of Southern Florida, Miami, Florida,
1966.